

## **USACE Celebrates Milestone - Dedication of the *Motor Vessel Blanchard***

March 7, 2008

Family, friends and colleagues of Raymond Blanchard came together at Port Allen Lock on March 7th for the formal dedication ceremony and christening of the New Orleans District's newest vessel, the *M/V Blanchard*.

Throughout the morning, inclement weather threatened, but fortunately the skies cooperated with no rainfall. In spite of a crisply overwhelming wind, the celebratory event took place in the presence of nearly seventy guests, a testament to Raymond Blanchard's legacy.

Blanchard began his career with the Corps of Engineers in 1961 as a deckhand on the Dredge Langfitt and also served as Quarter Master and Drag Tender Operator on that outfit. In 1964, Blanchard became the Lock and Dam Operator at Calcasieu Lock, and was then promoted to Lock Master in 1980. Throughout his 35-year tenure, Blanchard cultivated an extraordinary reputation as well as a deep-rooted commitment to excellence.

In addition to the traditional breaking of a champagne bottle and unveiling of the vessel's name, the dockside ceremony featured observations from LTC Murray Starkel and others who knew Blanchard well.

Chris Accardo, Chief of Operations and host of the ceremony, opened with poignant remarks: "Raymond Blanchard not only set the standards high, but also put forth the exhausting effort necessary to maintain the standards that he set."

Greg Breerwood, former Chief of Operations and Mike Park, former Assistant Chief of Operations, each shared some anecdotes illustrating what an utter privilege it was to know Blanchard both personally and professionally.

It is no surprise that to this day, Blanchard's peers celebrate him as the "unofficial leader" of the lockmasters.

After the formal speeches concluded, guests gathered near the dock to watch as members of the Blanchard family, joined by LTC Starkel and Chris Accardo, ceremoniously broke a bottle of champagne at the vessel's bow.

The *M/V Blanchard* has a fundamental role as one of the three vessels used to conduct hydrographic surveys of the Southwest Pass, the main distributary of the Lower Mississippi River. Survey data is used to generate plots, which are necessary to determine the condition of the navigation channel, if and where dredging is required, as well as when dredging is no longer needed. Preservation of this channel is a national priority, because the Southwest Pass serves as a chief economic pipeline into the heart of the country.